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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abyei

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 32 of Security Council resolution 2386 (2017), in which the Council requested to be informed of progress in implementing the mandate of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) and to have any serious violations of all applicable agreements brought to its immediate attention. It also provides an update on the status of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. It covers the period since the issuance of my previous report (S/2017/870), from 17 October 2017 to 29 March 2018.

II. Abyei

Security situation

2. Over the reporting period, the security situation in the Abyei Area was generally stable but remained unpredictable. The onset of the dry season and migration into the Abyei Area of the Misseriya began in mid-October, two weeks earlier than usual due to a lack of rain during the wet season, forcing the seasonal movement of livestock to start earlier. To facilitate the southward migration, UNISFA started its switch from wet to dry season deployment in mid-October 2017 by erecting temporary operating bases at Um Khariet in Sector North, Alal, Donguop and Madington in Sector Centre and Agany Toak in Sector South, to cover potential migration flash points. UNISFA controlled the migration corridors and dominated the areas through tactical deployments in flash points and through short, medium and long-range patrols. In addition, to enhance the mission's visibility and reach across the Abyei Area, ground patrols were supplemented by weekly aerial patrols in areas of suspected armed group activity. UNISFA also supported existing early warning grass-roots structures, namely the joint security committees and the joint peace committee, to minimize the possibility of migration-related inter-community violence. Some 34 meetings of the joint security committees were held in all three sectors to provide early warning.

3. Reports by the local population indicating the presence of unidentified armed groups in the vicinity of Athony, Maluak Agak, Agany Toak, Noong, Rumajak and Shamam were followed up by UNISFA troops, as both a preventive and a deterrent measure. On 1 December, UNISFA arrested two armed Misseriya men attempting to rob a shop in Shamam, Sector North. On 4 December, in an armed attack by unidentified individuals at Rumajak, Sector Centre, two civilians were injured. On 9 January, nine bandits, believed to be members of an armed group attempting to rob

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civilians and United Nations personnel, surrendered to the Diffra oil police in Sector North. On 13 January, unknown armed men attacked a civilian vehicle at Rumamier, Sector South, injuring the Ngok Dinka driver.

4. Acts of violence also occurred near the Amiet common market, which continues to attract displaced persons from South Sudan seeking economic opportunities. On 26 November, a Dinka man attempting to rob the shop of a Misseriya trader was stabbed and killed by the shop owner. On 22 January, another Dinka man was injured under similar circumstances. On 24 January, a Misseriya man was apprehended with a hand grenade in the common market. On 19 January, in a brawl following a disagreement over a cattle transaction between members of both communities, four individuals were injured, and the market was closed. A separate cattle rustling incident in eastern Abyei Area, in which Ngok Dinka men rustled 107 cattle belonging to the Misseriya, aggravated tensions. The common market only resumed operation on 1 February, once 39 of the stolen cows were recovered by the Ngok Dinka community, assisted by UNISFA, and returned to their owner. Three cattle rustlers were apprehended and handed over to the community protection committee for prosecution.

5. In pursuit of its mandate to provide security across the Abyei Area, the Mission patrolled the entire expanse of the area. UNISFA was denied freedom of movement on a handful of occasions. On 23 January, a Mine Action Service (UNMAS) team conducting a route assessment patrol along the Athony-Awang Thou-Lort route was stopped at a checkpoint in Awang Thou by Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) soldiers. On 25 January, UNISFA returned to the SPLA checkpoint, accompanied by SPLA national monitors who form part of the Joint Military Observation Committee, to ascertain that the SPLA presence was indeed within the southern limits of Abyei Area. A global positioning system confirmed this. On 2 February, another UNISFA patrol was stopped by unarmed locals who claimed that the area was in Twic State and not part of Abyei Area. In a separate development, on 25 January, UNMAS, on a route assessment patrol, was informed by locals of a Sudanese Armed Forces checkpoint along the Diffra-Shamam-Um Khaer route close to the northern limit of the Abyei Area. A follow-up UNISFA patrol dispatched on 29 January to investigate the allegation did not find any evidence of such presence.

6. The Ngok Dinka community in Abyei town protested outside UNISFA headquarters on 18 December and 23 January. Some 400 persons attended the 18 December demonstration. Numbers swelled to 2,000 for the 23 January demonstration, which was led by the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief, Bulabek Deng Kuol. On both occasions, a petition was handed over to UNISFA, which, inter alia, complained about the perceived negative impact on local employment of the implementation of a new camp management services contract. UNISFA movement through the main gate was obstructed for a few hours on both occasions. UNISFA met several times with the local chiefs and representatives of individual contractors to address their concerns and explain the situation.

7. Despite those efforts, on 11 February, all exit gates at UNISFA headquarters were blocked by members of the local community, which immobilized all but the critical activities of the mission and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes. Once again, UNISFA engaged extensively with the traditional chiefs, and the blockade was lifted some 60 hours later, on 13 February. However, individual contractors and national staff continued to stay away from work until 18 February for fear of retribution by the local community. One international staff member was temporarily relocated to Kadugli on 15 February.

Local level peace process

8. UNISFA has enhanced its role in fostering intercommunal dialogue through logistical support to joint peace committee meetings in Abyei town, Dokura, Amiet, Todach, Leu and Marial Achak. The logistics of joint peace committee meetings were sustained by an international non-governmental organization. As funding from its main donor was discontinued, so were its activities. UNISFA has since taken on the role of supporting the committee and its weekly meetings. During these meetings, community representatives have agreed on ways to address issues affecting peace and harmony, including criminal activities, and agreed on modalities of payment of compensation to victims or their families. On 14 December 2017, Ngok Dinka representatives compensated a Misseriya pastoralist for the theft of 10 of his cows in January 2017. To date, the Misseriya have paid compensation for 10 of 21 Ngok Dinka victims. Conversely, the Ngok Dinka have paid compensation for 3 of 14 Misseriya victims killed over the past year.

9. UNISFA support to such grass-roots committees has created an environment conducive to the continued growth of the Amiet common market. The market attracts commerce not only from within Abyei Area but also from neighbouring areas in the Sudan and South Sudan. UNISFA continues to provide security to the market and its environs, while United Nations police assists the market committee with law and order. The number of vendors and market goers continues to rise, as does the number of displaced persons from South Sudan seeking employment opportunities there.

10. Ngok Dinka traditional leaders have advised UNISFA of growing tensions between them and their neighbours to the south, the Twic Dinka, owing to a longstanding land issue within the Abyei Area. Tensions have also arisen due to reports that some Twic Dinka and Misseriya were developing an economic corridor that would pass through the western fringes of the Abyei Area, with a view to circumventing the Ngok Dinka, and developing a market that would compete with the Amiet common market.

11. Hostilities have been on the rise between the Misseriya and the Nuer. From 16 to 17 February, 32 Misseriya were reportedly killed at Kadama to the east of and outside of Abyei Area by Nuer from Mayom county, South Sudan. The killings were linked to an incident of aggravated cattle rustling. As the victims are related to those migrating through Abyei Area, reconciliation efforts are being undertaken by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

12. UNISFA has supported peacebuilding activities, and a peacebuilding working group comprising relevant UNISFA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes staff was re-established on 20 February, after a two-year hiatus. Chaired by UNISFA and the Resident Coordinator Office, the working group focused on strengthening synergies in such areas of mutual interest as gender, reconciliation, migration and traditional justice.

13. With regard to traditional justice, UNISFA visited community protection committee detention facilities to assess the holding conditions of detainees, the management of existing facilities and the offences for which detainees were charged and convicted. The assessment revealed that facilities were understaffed and that the personnel were unqualified, rendering procedures inapplicable, and prolonging pretrial detention, owing to an inability to conduct investigations and bring offenders to trial in a timely manner. Engagement with the Juba-appointed Abyei chief prosecutor in charge of carrying out investigations for both civil and criminal offences was limited, as UNISFA cannot interact with unilaterally appointed public administration bodies. From 1 to 3 March, a workshop on traditional justice specific to the Ngok Dinka community, led by United Nations agencies, funds and programme,

took place in Abyei town. UNISFA intends to facilitate a similar workshop in the coming weeks in the northern part of Abyei, as well as a joint workshop between both communities.

14. An intercommunity pre-migration conference jointly organized by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme, with UNISFA support, scheduled to take place at the UNISFA company operation base in Todach from 6 to 8 February, was postponed twice owing to the reluctance of the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya representatives to participate. The conference was eventually held from 3 to 5 March, with the participation of more than 100 Ngok Dinka and Misseriya, including women and children. Participants agreed on a number of conclusions that were reached with regard to regulating the relations between the Misseriya and Ngok Dinkain the areas of security, the settlement of disputes and social justice. UNISFA provided logistical and security support for the conference.

15. With a view to enhancing community engagement and building local support, UNISFA completed 8 of 25 quick impact projects in support of livelihoods and basic humanitarian, social and development needs. All such projects, which are selected based on geographic and thematic priorities, were expected to be finalized by late May.

Political developments

16. UNISFA continued to engage with the Governments of the Sudan and South Sudan, as did the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sudan and South Sudan, on the need for both parties to fully implement agreements related to Abyei Area and their common border. The UNISFA Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander held meetings in Khartoum with senior officials of the Sudanese Ministry for Foreign Affairs on 30 November 2017 and with military intelligence officials on 25 February. In Juba, on 30 January, he met with Minister for Foreign Affairs Deng Alor Kwol and high-ranking officials, including the head of the Abyei file negotiations committee and the co-chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee, South Sudan. During these meetings, UNISFA reiterated the need to establish joint institutions in Abyei Area, without which Abyei Area would continue to operate in a vacuum in terms of administration and the rule of law, a circumstance prejudicial to its development and the livelihood of its people. UNISFA emphasized that such institutions could also prevent or address unilateral action by either side, such as the start of commercial flights at the Agok airstrip on 19 November 2017, which would better be addressed jointly.

17. Discussions also focused on the need for sustained cooperation and on the need to dispel perceptions of UNISFA bias towards either of the two parties. In this regard, taking into consideration the need for impartiality, existing rules and regulations and security considerations, UNISFA was obliged to decline a request to transport Minister Deng Alor Kwol and a delegation of 34 members on a UNISFA flight on 3 January to accompany the remains of Ambassador Kuol Alor Kuol, the late South Sudanese representative to the United Nations Office in Geneva, from Wau, South Sudan, to Abyei.

18. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee held its tenth ordinary session under African Union auspices in Addis Ababa on 13 November 2017. During the meeting, agreement could not be reached on the inclusion in the agenda of the issue of the Abyei Area Administration. The new Co-Chair of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee for South Sudan, Mr. Deng Arop, argued that the Committee was a supervisory institution to oversee joint institutions but that the latter could only be established by the two presidents, not by the Committee. Since the issue of Abyei did

not feature in the 1 November presidential summit, there is a continued deadlock over the question of joint institutions. In a press release issued on 24 November, the African Union Commission called for resolution of the matter prior to the next Committee meeting. The next Committee meeting, which was to be held by mid-February, had yet to be convened as at the time of publication of the present report.

19. In a positive development, on 14 November 2017, the traditional chiefs of the Misseriya and Ngok Dinka communities met in Addis Ababa. The meeting had been called for during an Abyei Joint Oversight Committee meeting held in March 2015. UNISFA facilitated the travel of the Ngok Dinka traditional chiefs from Abyei to Juba to attend the meeting. Both sides called for the release of the report of the Abyei Area Joint Investigation and Inquiry Committee on the killing of the Ngok Dinka Paramount Chief on 4 May 2013, and urged that, upon the release of the report, the African Union engage with the affected communities and families to promote peace and reconciliation. The traditional leaders also agreed on the establishment of a fund to compensate victims of attacks and rustling. They further underscored the need for economic regeneration, including joint access to the proceeds of oil revenues from Abyei Area, in line with the Abyei Protocol to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. They also expressed their full support for maintaining the common market in Amiet.

20. The Abyei Joint Oversight Committee co-chair of the Sudan, Hassan Ali Nimir, also paid a visit to northern Abyei from 3 to 10 March, where he addressed some 150 locals from surrounding areas at a meeting in Diffra and oversaw the renewal of some population councils in northern Abyei, whose main task was to mediate disputes at the local level and fill the administrative vacuum in the area.

Police and Mine Action Service activities

21. In the absence of an Abyei police service, United Nations police continued to provide advice and mentoring on law and order and effective policing to community protection committees and the joint peace committee at the Amiet common market, ensuring that the committees adhere to international standards and human rights when executing law and order duties in accordance with Security Council resolution 2205 (2015). In addition to the five team sites at Abyei, Banton, Agok, Todach and Diffra, on request of the communities, United Nations police plan to establish three team sites, in Tajalei, Goli and Marial Achack, to address issues related to law and order, in conjunction with the local community. The United Nations police have conducted a total of 1,540 community interactive patrols during the reporting period and, on 27 November, trained 51 Agok community protection committee members, including seven females, on law and order duties. Two crime awareness campaigns were conducted in Noong and Tajalei, and three traffic awareness campaigns were held in Ajok, Diffra and the Amiet common market.

22. In preparation for the eventual establishment of an Abyei police service, the United Nations police, in conjunction with United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the traditional leaders of both communities, conducted a mapping exercise in the Abyei Area from 30 November 2017 to 2 February 2018 to identify potential areas in which to establish Abyei police stations and prisons. The Government of the Sudan raised objections to that endeavour. In the meeting with the military intelligence of the Sudan on 25 February, the UNISFA Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander clarified that the exercise was merely preparatory work for the Abyei police service being formed as per the signed agreements.

23. The United Nations police continued to implement its gender-related activities with the communities, conducting 13 sexual and gender-based violence awareness

campaigns, covering sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence, child marriage, forced marriage and child abuse. The United Nations police will continue to promote gender awareness in coordination with the gender affairs officer.

24. In line with the UNISFA mandate to ensure freedom of movement and the identification and clearance of mines in the Abyei Area and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, UNMAS verified that 358 kilometres (km) of priority routes and 389,068 square metres of land were safe from explosive hazards. These routes allow UNISFA to deploy to additional temporary operating bases in the dry season as part of the strengthening of its military presence of the area. Non-technical survey and mine risk education activities in various communities led to the identification and destruction of 23 explosive remnants of war, one anti-tank mine, one anti-personnel fragmentation mine and two units of small arms ammunition. UNMAS has also destroyed 8 rifles and 209 small arms at the UNISFA weapons storage site. Mine risk education messages were delivered to 12,008 men, women, boys and girls living in the Abyei Area, including nomadic herdsmen and returnees, and to 468 UNISFA troops, military observers and United Nations police officers.

Humanitarian situation

25. Humanitarian and recovery needs remained significant in the Abyei Area because of population movements, intercommunal tensions and lack of basic public services. The challenging economic situation in the Sudan and South Sudan has further affected the area. The United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and non-governmental organizations assisted approximately 170,000 vulnerable people across all sectors in the Abyei Area, including 80,000 people from the Ngok Dinka community, 15,000 Ngok Dinka displaced within the Abyei Area, 11,000 people displaced from neighbouring Unity State and Warrap State in South Sudan, 29,000 Misseriya who remained back in Abyei Area during the rainy season and 35,000 seasonal Misseriya migrants who entered the area in October 2017 and are expected to return in mid-2018. An estimated 10,000 persons displaced by conflict in South Sudan transited through Abyei Area, at an average of 2,500 people per month, to reach destinations in the Sudan. Their transit was monitored by IOM at the Amiet common market and Diffra, with some receiving limited basic assistance.

26. Over 80,000 vulnerable people benefited from various food-assistance-related activities, mainly through food for assets programmes, in central and southern parts of Abyei. In addition, a total of 6,192 vulnerable displaced people from Unity State in South Sudan have benefited from general food distribution. Meanwhile, 22,000 students, enrolled in 27 schools, received daily school meals. Efforts to support community livelihoods and recovery activities benefited both Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities as well as displaced persons. Activities included refresher training of community animal health workers; the vaccination and treatment of approximately 200,000 livestock belonging to both the Ngok Dinka and Misseriya communities; support to agricultural production through the distribution of seeds and tools, coupled with specific training sessions; the construction of a market in Abathok, in Sector South, and of three grinding mills, two community halls and a vegetable garden; and the implementation of a pilot community-based shelter project for some 120 households in the Kolom returnee village in southern Abyei Area.

27. Integrated primary health-care and nutrition services, including routine immunization and the provision of essential drugs, continued in the 14 health facilities, including the two hospitals in Abyei and Agok towns. A clinic in Goli, Sector North, was constructed and will be operational soon, as the fifth clinic in the northern Abyei Area. Meanwhile, the nutrition screening and programming support for patients with moderate and acute malnutrition continued under the targeted supplementary feeding programme throughout Abyei Area. The targeted

supplementary feeding programme covered a monthly average of 7,000 children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women across the Abyei Area. In addition, awareness-raising and capacity-building activities were conducted, including on-the-job training for clinical staff and health awareness sessions.

28. In northern Abyei Area, the supply of safe water to the communities and seasonal migrants remains a challenge. Existing hand pumps were upgraded to mini solar-powered water yards at eight locations; seven new hand pumps boreholes were drilled; and three water yards and 38 hand pumps were repaired, benefiting some 30,000 people. Other major activities included the construction of school ablution facilities; training of water user committees and counterparts in water management; the maintenance of solar-powered water yards; the distribution of hygiene kits to school children; the construction of 220 household latrines in sites for displaced persons and communities in Agok, Sector South. However, with a limited law enforcement system, vandalism and theft of solar systems and water facilities equipment were rampant.

29. The absence of formal authority structures in the Abyei Area poses additional challenges in carrying out and coordinating humanitarian and recovery activities. It raises questions regarding the sustainability of basic services, including the running of schools and health facilities. Similarly, in the absence of rule of law structures, women and children are exposed to risks of violence, exploitation and abuse. While humanitarian organizations working in the area have limited capacity, community expectations are high. Considering these challenges, UNISFA and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are endeavouring to attract donor attention to Abyei Area to overcome the deficit of governmental investment.

Administrative aspects and mission support

30. As at 25 March, the UNISFA military component stood at 4,492 personnel (4,287 troops, 79 military observers and 109 staff officers), against an authorized ceiling of 4,791. The UNISFA police component stood at 39 officers (27 men and 12 women), of an authorized total of 50, which is the highest number deployed since the mission was established in 2011. The number of civilian staff stood at 140 international, 32 United Nations Volunteers and 75 national staff, against an authorized total of 161 international, 33 United Nations Volunteers and 89 national staff posts. The Government of the Sudan issued 175 visas for UNISFA personnel during the reporting period, while 50 visas remained pending for five international staff members, 9 military personnel, two United Nations police and 32 contractors. In an unfortunate incident, on 3 February, three national staff and two individual contractors employed at the UNISFA logistics base in Kadugli lost their lives in a road traffic accident near El Obeid, Sudan.

31. The mission continued to upgrade the infrastructure and environmental installations at all camps. Prefabricated buildings that were no longer fit for purpose owing to age and degradation were replaced at seven company operating bases. The conversion of the Noong temporary operating base into a permanent operating base was completed. Site preparation works at the expansion site at the mission headquarters and the improvement of living conditions in the Abyei Camp are 90 per cent complete.

32. With regard to environmental and hygiene issues, of the 36 planned wastewater treatment plants for all UNISFA bases, 18 have been installed. It is anticipated that all will be installed by 30 June 2018. The mission currently relies on individual contractors for the operation and maintenance of these plants, which has left the mission exposed owing to lack of adequate skills or accountability framework. A more effective operation of this critical plant equipment depends on the implementation of

a camp services contract, which has been delayed owing to resistance from the local community in Abyei, as reported in paragraphs 6 and 7 above. The mission is actively engaged with the local community and other stakeholders in order to resolve the issue.

33. UNISFA continued to operate four helicopters and three fixed-wing aircraft. Of the 101 missions undertaken during the reporting period, 27 were aerial patrols of the Abyei Area, 41 were patrols by the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, 14 were rotation flights in support of the Mechanism and 5 were air support to the African Union border team for the marking of crossing points between the Sudan and South Sudan. Until 31 December, the Mission shared the costs of one of its aircraft with the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Furthermore, UNISFA is following up on the Secretary-General's initiative for effective and efficient aviation operations, and will share one regional jet aircraft with UNMISS in the 2018/19 financial year. The mission continued to receive ground-handling support from the contracted services providers of MONUSCO in Entebbe, Uganda, and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur in Khartoum. During the reporting period, the mission completed the rotation of 1,110 force protection unit troops of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism (557 inbound and 553 outbound) and the transportation of 65 tons of inbound and outbound troops' luggage through Kadugli airport. All of the luggage was transported by road between Kadugli and Abyei, as the Government of the Sudan continues to withhold permission for use of the 90 per cent completed airstrip at Athony, Sector South. This increases the strain on air assets. Overall, the mission transported a total of 4,296 passengers, 58.5 tons of luggage and 146.7 tons of cargo by air, and 2,158 tons of cargo by road.

III. Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism

34. Since my last report on 17 October 2017, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism has made significant progress. Its activities have been reinvigorated by the commitment made by the two sides in their joint letter to the President of the Security Council of 24 September, in which the two ministers for foreign affairs assured the Council of mutual cooperation in implementing resolutions 1990 (2011) of 27 June 2011 and 2352 (2017) of 15 May 2017. In a letter dated 23 October, the African Union Commission Chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, wrote to the Secretary-General reiterating the African Union's appreciation for the support extended by the United Nations to UNISFA and the Mechanism. He emphasized that any steps that altered the current arrangements related to UNISFA and the Mechanism could have serious implications on the ground and for wider regional stability. He also stated that efforts were under way to urgently convene an extraordinary session of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism later that month.

35. On 31 October, an ordinary session of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was held in Khartoum in preparation for a high-level meeting of Presidents Al-Bashir and Kiir. Both sides agreed to immediately reactivate the Mechanism and the joint security committee and to redeploy their forces out of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The following day, on 1 November, in a summit meeting between the two presidents, held in Khartoum, they agreed to strengthen relations and renewed their commitment to the implementation of all the cooperation agreements signed in September 2012.

36. As regards the ordinary Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting, the next meeting slated for 8 January 2018 was postponed. An extraordinary session was convened by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel in Addis Ababa on 4 February. The delegation of South Sudan was led by the Minister of Defence and

Veterans' Affairs, while the Sudan was represented by the Chief of Joint Staff of the Sudanese Armed Forces. During this meeting, UNISFA shared details of the progress made by the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism and of areas in which further efforts by both parties were urgently needed. The Mechanism recalled that, shortly after the Joint Political and Security Mechanism meeting in late October, UNISFA received the notification from both sides that the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone had been vacated. UNISFA also stated that there were two ongoing ground missions within the Zone, at Safahah/Kiir Adem and Tishwin respectively, representing encouraging steps by both sides to support UNISFA and the Mechanism. However, the redeployment of military presences out of the Zone had not taken place in the Tishwin area, where the presence of troops of the two sides were barely 600 metres apart.

37. The meeting also focused on the redeployment of forces outside the SDBZ, the operationalization of the team sites, border crossing points, the marking of the centreline of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, the activation of the ad hoc committee for the 14 Mile Area and reports of the presence of unknown forces in nine locations north of the Zone. The outcome document from this meeting included specific actions to be taken and reported on at the next meeting, scheduled for 5 March, to be preceded by a meeting of the joint security committee held in Juba.

38. On 27 February, the seventh meeting of the joint security committee was held in Juba. The meeting recognized that generally progress had been made in relation to the withdrawal of forces from the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. It called for the establishment of a joint committee, with the participation of the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, to work with UNISFA in verifying the redeployment of SPLA and Sudanese Armed Forces from the Zone within 15 days and recommended that the Joint Political and Security Mechanism expedite the process of determining the exact coordinates of the border crossing points with the Technical Team no later than 15 March.

39. The first meeting of the ad hoc committee of the 14 Mile Area, facilitated by UNISFA, was held on 27 February at Gok Machar. Two representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces and three from SPLA took part, along with two UNISFA members. They discussed operational matters and formulated the draft terms of reference of the committee, which were approved by the Joint Political and Security Mechanism on 5 March.

40. On 5 March, UNISFA attended the extraordinary session of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism in Addis Ababa. The session was convened by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and attended by the South Sudanese Minister of Defence and the Sudanese State Minister of Defence. UNISFA briefed on the progress achieved, inter alia, the status of redeployment of military troops out of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone by the end of February, and shared satellite imagery of eight locations of suspected military presence. It noted that they had received assurances from South Sudan that these were not SPLA elements. UNISFA also briefed on the challenges faced at the team sites. Both parties decided, inter alia, to designate sites to mark crossing points by 20 March and to grant standing clearance for all ground monitoring and verification patrols as well as helicopter landings within the Zone. The next extraordinary meeting of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism was to be held in April 2018.

41. The Security Council requirement that the two sides resume holding border demarcation discussions has been met. The Joint Border Commission met in November 2017 for the first time since September 2016, and the Joint Demarcation Committee met in December 2017.

42. Also, on 19 February, in line with a decision of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism, the African Union Border Programme invited UNISFA and UNMAS officials to Khartoum to consult on preparations for the upcoming identification and marking on the ground of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone centreline, its outer limits and checkpoints at four border crossing corridors.

43. The border crossings to be opened in phase 1 were identified at a meeting held on 20 February in Khartoum, convened by the African Union Border Programme Technical Team and attended by the Joint Technical Border Corridors Committee, comprising technical experts from both sides. The border crossing corridors identified were Kosti-Renk (both river and land), Panthou (Heglig)-Bentiu, Muglad-Meiram-Aweil and El Rodam Buram-Tumsaha-Raja. On 19 March, the African Union Border Programme Technical Team, accompanied by the Joint Border Technical Crossings Committee and the joint security committee, supported by UNISFA and UNMAS, completed the marking of five points on the Bentiu-Heglig corridor of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. They established the outer limits to the north and south, the centreline and two checkpoints for customs and immigration. The team marked the corridor at Meiram-Aweil on 21 March and on 23 March, the team proceeded to mark the Kosti-Renk corridor. While it successfully marked this northern limit, it was prevented from marking the centre and southern limit by the Governor of Upper Nile State.

Operations

44. On 15 November, the Security Council, in paragraph 2 of its resolution 2386 (2017), stipulated that the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism shall be on its final extension unless the parties take the specific measures described in paragraph 9 of the resolution. The paragraph calls for the two sides to deliver on the outcomes of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism agreements reached in May and October 2017 for the Security Council to renew the UNISFA mandate to support the Mechanism. In paragraph 9, the Security Council called for full freedom of movement for UNISFA air and ground patrols, the opening of the phase 1 border crossing corridors, the holding of at least one meeting to resume border demarcation discussions, the reactivation of the ad hoc committee of the 14 Mile Area, the operationalization of the four Mechanism team sites and the convening of at least two meetings of the Joint Political and Security Mechanism. Progress has been made on each of these.

45. On 25 January, UNISFA and national monitors from the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLA departed from the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism headquarters, in Kadugli, on a ground patrol to establish and occupy a temporary team site at Tishwin. On the same day, UNISFA and national monitors from the Sudanese Armed Forces and SPLA departed from Gok Machar to establish a temporary Mechanism team site at Safahah. An initial attempt from both sector headquarters locations on 31 December had been unsuccessful, owing to the presence of SPLA elements in Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, who demanded that the ground monitoring missions to return to respective bases. A Sudanese Armed Forces presence was also sighted within the Zone at Tishwin, along with Sudanese oil police. In January, UNISFA took up this denial of freedom of movement with the South Sudanese authorities and was reassured that the local military commanders had been informed of UNISFA operations.

46. On 26 January, the team site at Safahah was temporarily established further north. On 6 February, UNMAS was compelled to suspend operations, as landing permission was not received from either side. On 12 February, an effort was made to relocate the team site southwards, but this was not possible, as the South Sudan national monitor did not participate and as UNMAS had suspended operations

temporarily. To address the issue, during a visit to the team site, the Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism ascertained that the Sudanese national monitors wanted the team site to be relocated southwards into the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone, while the South Sudan side was adamant that since the Zone was not demarcated, the location was deemed appropriate. The Sudanese senior national monitor pointed out that a guarantee of security could not be given at the location since it was outside of the Zone on the Sudanese side. There were two occasions in January when unidentified armed groups were sighted near the team site. The disagreement over relocation of the team site, withdrawal of the national monitors and a potentially adverse security situation led to the team site being withdrawn to Gok Machar on 23 February. On 23 March, the Joint Border Verification Monitoring Mechanism conducted a ground patrol with the intent to establish the team site south of the Kiir river, within the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. The local population, backed by the administrator of Kiir Adem, blocked this attempt.

47. On 26 January, an attempt to establish the team site at the intended location in Tishwin that had been surveyed by helicopter during a preliminary survey for an appropriate location on 20 September, was unsuccessful, as the ground monitoring mission was turned back by SPLA elements in the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone to the immediate north of the centre-line on the Sudan side. The Sudanese Armed Forces were found to be located 200 meters from the SPLA at Tishwin. The team site was therefore set up away from the centreline. On 23 March, reconnaissance of the centre-line did not establish the presence of Sudanese Armed Forces or SPLA troops in the vicinity.

48. South Sudan agreed to withdraw the SPLA from Tishwin by 12 February. However, UNISFA verification patrols from the Tishwin team site were unable to verify withdrawal, as the SPLA national monitor at the team site refused to join the patrol. The Chief of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, during a visit to Tishwin on 19 February, ascertained from the South Sudanese national monitors that they had not received clearance from Juba for joint patrols. Following further engagement, on 18 March, the Tishwin team site conducted ground patrols to the centreline of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. No military presence was sighted.

49. On 21 March, the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism commenced the establishment of a temporary base at As Sumayah.

50. On 7 March, a Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism special verification patrol in El Mgeins, Gerger and Goda reported the presence of military camps and suspected military hardware and vehicles at El Mgeins and armed personnel, a suspected mortar position and heavy artillery guns at Gerger. Another military camp was also observed in the same area, with the presence of soldiers and armoured vehicles. A special verification patrol by the Mechanism in the general area of As Sumayah War Guit was also conducted on 7 March. The area was found to be stable, with no visible presence of armed elements. On 14 March, during an aerial patrol by the Mechanism west of Safahah Kiir Adem, a suspected military camp was observed. During a verification patrol on 23 March, UNISFA could not confirm the existence of the suspected military camp, as it was denied access to the area by the local population and town administrator.

Financial aspects

51. The General Assembly, by its resolution 71/298 of 30 June 2017, appropriated the amount of $266.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. As at 16 March 2018, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNISFA amounted to $83.3 million. Total outstanding

assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at that date amounted to $2,672.8 million. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 31 December 2017, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2017, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

Observations and recommendations

52. The Abyei Area has continued to remain relatively stable and secure during the reporting period, in large part thanks to the presence and activities of UNISFA. UNISFA also facilitated access to and the delivery of humanitarian aid. It has not however been able to address certain issues beyond its remit, such as the withdrawal of the Diffra oil police, which remain in place despite successive Security Council resolutions calling for their withdrawal. Similarly, UNISFA has not been able to support the interim institutions, which have yet to be set up by the two sides. In this regard, the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee and the Joint Military Observation Committee are not functioning jointly as had been intended. Even though the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee is vested with oversight functions for joint institutions that are not in place, its role must be expanded to help contend with issues related to governance and law and order. Regular meetings of the Abyei Joint Oversight Committee would also be useful to address issues that, in the absence of a joint administration, must be handled by UNISFA even though such a role is not in keeping with its mandate.

53. The relatively stable situation on the ground has not generated forward movement at the political level. Although there are grave political and economic challenges that the two Governments continue to grapple with, the political status quo between the parties on the issue of Abyei cannot be sustained or countenanced indefinitely. I therefore call on the two Governments to undertake discussions at the ministerial level to review the implementation of their cooperation agreements signed in September 2012. A similar meeting on the agreement of 20 June 2011 would also help advance the joint institutions or other mutually agreed interim arrangements. As an interim step, taking advantage of the presence of UNISFA, I urge the two sides to set up interim joint institutions and normalize border arrangements by opening border crossing corridors and undertaking border demarcations.

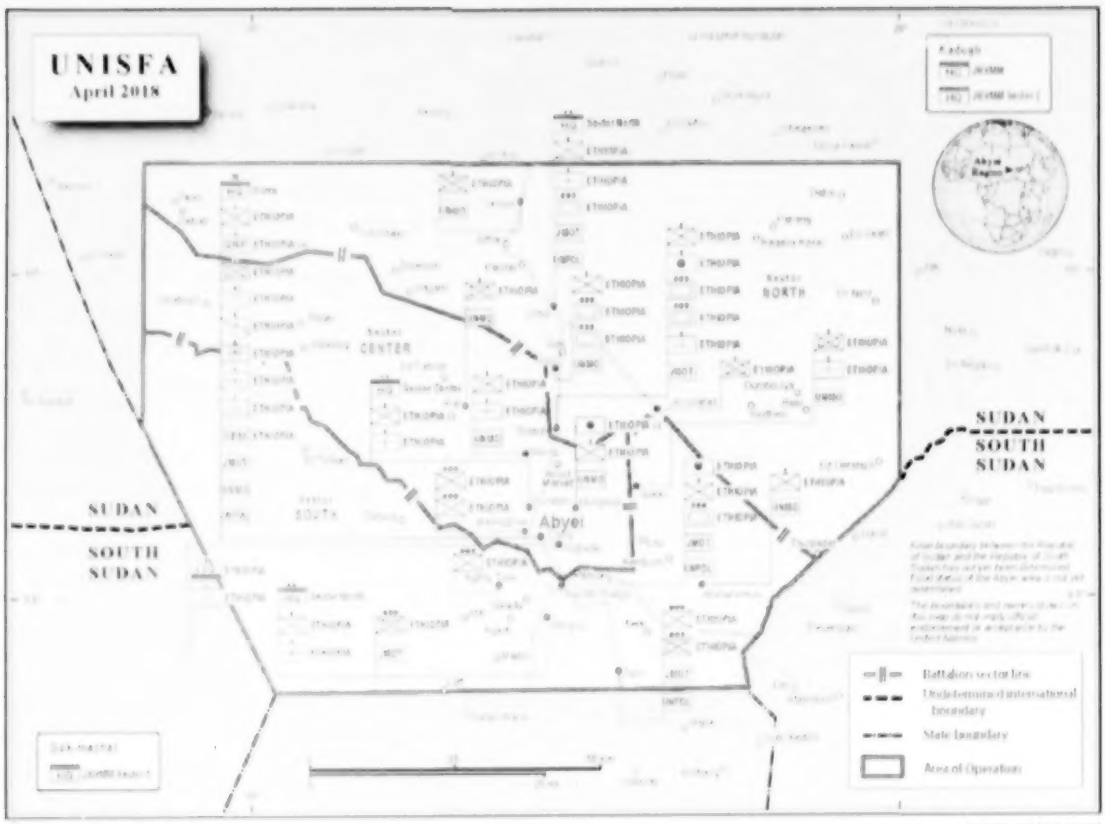
54. I urge the Security Council to encourage the two parties to act expeditiously in resolving their disputes and to use the opportunity of prevailing stability to make progress on the final status of the Abyei Area. Addressing outstanding issues from the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is necessary to unlock the status quo and make further progress.

55. With regard to the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism, UNISFA effectively supports the Mechanism through its monitoring, verification and investigation activities. As I have noted in my report, the Mechanism has made notable progress, as both Governments have put considerable effort into implementing their agreements on the border. In fact, more progress has been made during the previous five months on the operationalization of the Mechanism than in the previous five years. This renewed momentum must be built upon and represents a compelling argument for the extension of the mandate in support of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism beyond 15 April. Over the past few months, both parties have been shown that they can and must work together. I therefore call on the Security Council to recognize the efforts and the important steps taken by the Sudan and South Sudan on their border and thus continue the support to this joint mechanism. I recommend an extension of UNISFA support to the Mechanism at initial operating capability for a further six months, making any future move to full operating

capability contingent upon the two countries' ability and willingness to implement progressively the outcomes of their border management discussions.

56. In addition, I have included UNISFA among the eight missions that are to be subject to a comprehensive external review in order to inform the upcoming strategic discussions in the Security Council. The review team visited Abyei and the wider region from 5 to 19 March and assessed the underpinning assumptions and the scope of the mandate, the conditions for its successful implementation and opportunities for improved performance and innovative solutions, including whether there is an achievable political solution and a viable exit strategy. Its findings will be presented to the Council ahead of its discussions on the renewal of the mandate of UNISFA.

57. In conclusion, I wish to extend my gratitude to the outgoing Acting Head of Mission and Force Commander Major General Tesfay Gidey Hailemichael, under whose tenure the Mission has implemented its mandate effectively, particularly with regard to the operationalizing of the Joint Border Verification and Monitoring Mechanism. I am particularly grateful to all UNISFA staff for their forbearance in face of the numerous challenges in Abyei Area and the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. Finally, I thank the partners of UNISFA from the agencies, funds and programmes and from the African Union — in particular former Presidents Mbeki and Abubakar of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel; my Special Envoy for the Sudan and South Sudan, Nicholas Haysom; and the Government of Ethiopia — for their tireless efforts to advance at the political level the peace process in relation to both the Abyei and border issues.


UNISFA
April 2018
SUDAN
SOUTH
SUDAN
Abyei
SUDAN
SOUTH
SUDAN
Battalion sector line
Undelineated international boundary
State boundary
Area of Operation